



KXO Radio Interviews NAF El Centro Commanding Officer about Festival of Flight

NAF EL CENTRO, Calif. – Capt. William Perkins, commanding officer, Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro discusses the March 13th event, the Festival of Flight featuring the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, during a candid interview with Gene Brister, president and general manager, KXO FM-107.5, March 8, 2021.

Gene Brister:

Good afternoon, everyone, Gene Brister. I have with me today the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Facility, El Centro, where something outstanding and historic is about to happen on the 13th of March. And, it's with a great deal of pleasure today that I introduced the C-O, and he's going to share with us what's going to happen. But you know, last year we couldn't do a show [due to COVID-19]. Well, this year, it's called the Festival of Flight. Lots of people, lots of kids are going to be happy, Captain.

Capt. Perkins:

Gene, thanks very much for coming out and joining us on the airfield. For those who can't see us over the radio, we're standing in what's called "show-center." This is where we normally do the production for the airshow. My name is Bill Perkins, I'm the Commanding Officer, a Navy Captain, and I've been here for about a year. I had the pleasure of assuming command of this great base just as we were putting those [COVID-19] safety precautions in place to protect our workforce and our community and keep us on mission. We've been able to do that for the whole year, the airfield never shut down. Military flight students come in and out of squadrons - rotate in and out and we've been fully functional while practicing COVID mitigation procedures that the Navy has aligned with local and national guidelines. That brings us to what we're making changes for this year's airshow.

Gene Brister:

Yes of course, they're all with the metrics of the COVID-19 pandemic. What an opportunity for a community that loves the air facility here, loves the soldiers here, and loves the sound of freedom that they hear all the time. And so, when they didn't get an air show for one year, that was tough. The Festival of Flight is going to be that air show! And, it'll be one of those things, Captain, if I can be so bold to say, as you light up the barbecue in the backyard, get a good position there and watch the show and hear the narration.

Capt. Perkins:

Yes, when we were assessing the situation with the goal of getting a yes, for something, we didn't know six-months ago, we didn't know what COVID-19 was going to look like, what the implications and challenges were going to be and the impact that it was going to have outside of the fence line, and inside the fence line as we get pilots ready to go on deployment. We had to manage that and put plans in place. Now thankfully, we got to a position where we're able to execute an event. The difference is it's

not going to be a public viewed event from an onboarding perspective, right? We're going to ask folks to stay safe at home and instead of you coming to us, we're going to bring the show to you. That's how we're approaching the show this year. So, it is going to be a live-event and we are going to have live acts. When we use the term virtual, that doesn't mean video-stream CGI aircraft, we're going to have live events that are capped-off by the world-famous Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron [the Blue Angels], as they finish their winter training season. The Blue Angels, that many hear flying every day, are going to put on one last performance before they start their tour.

Gene Brister:

And you plan to have other guests as well this year which will make people really happy. You want to tell us about it?

Capt. Perkins:

Absolutely. One of the things that I found very intriguing with a small base in the middle of Imperial Valley, is that every Feb., we had squadrons or aircraft from all four-services of the Department of Defense training here. The Army is down there in hangar eight, our permanent trainers in hangar nine, and the Marine Corps out of hangar two and working in our weapons loading area. Then there is the Air Force Thunderbirds conducting joint-training with the Blue Angels while Air Mobility Command is moving Navy, Marine and Air Force personnel around the country. The festival is a representation of this. The Air Force is going to bring some A10-Thunderbolts down and then obviously the Leapfrogs are going to jump out of something to kick-off the event. And then, the stars of the show, the Blue Angels.

Gene Brister:

Well, if you've never experienced the Blue Angels, wow, I can't encourage you enough to listen. Check this out! I know it's hard to believe but there are some people that have never seen them [the Blue Angels]. If you haven't experienced the Leapfrogs, you're in for an incredible treat! And I know there's lots of people that are listening that are going to say, "oh yeah, the Leapfrogs, that's the one's that come out with a huge American flag, what an incredible sight!"

Capt. Perkins:

You can picture that huge flag and a jet noise, you know that's the sound of freedom, right?

Gene Brister:

Yes! Now it's virtual but that's kind of misleading in a sense because the planes are going to be here in action. You're not going to be on the base or near the outside perimeter, but you can be in the comfort of your backyard to watch and listen.

Capt. Perkins:

Many of you across the deck can hear us right now, whether it's Seely or all the way up to Brawley. I've watched the Blue Angels show from downtown Brawley. It's a different perspective, but you can absolutely see and enjoy it! And then everywhere in-between, you can see most of the events from your

own backyard. It is important that we ask you not to come to the base on that day; we'll bring the event to you live on the radio. And, we're going to record video and share the highlight posts from the show afterwards.

Gene Brister:

Show starts at 1230 to 430. What a great way to end an afternoon on a Saturday! For those of us that are affectionate aviation-aficionados and whatnot, not being able to see the planes last year really makes absence of the heart grow fonder. I think there's a lot of truth in that.

Capt. Perkins:

Yes, a lot of people have been working hard on this event for many months, and we couldn't have got to the "yes" without the close relationship and the working spirit we have developed with county leadership and town councils across the valley. Everyone had the same vision, "let's figure out a way to host an event safely. Let's bring some morale back to the community and highlight that great relationship the Navy has with the residents of the Imperial Valley." I want to thank everyone out there that has helped us outside the fence line. Great team effort!

Gene Brister:

You'll be able to hear it on KXO AM 1230 and FM 107.5.

Capt. Perkins:

And, I understand you're going to be simulcasting the audio across your website. Is that right?

Gene Brister:

We'll check on that.

Capt. Perkins:

And we'll provide the updated information on our official command web page as well.

Gene Brister:

Exactly. We're looking forward to it. It's called, the Festival of Flight.

Capt. Perkins:

Festival of Flight, the inaugural year which we'll continue to follow going forward. And, this is our 75th Anniversary of NAFEC which motivated us to rebrand the airshow into the model we will now forever be known as.

Gene Brister:

And this is the 75th anniversary of the Blue Angels, right?

Capt. Perkins:

Yes, but they've been at NAF since about 67'.

Gene Brister:

While we're talking, if you just joined this interview, I'm speaking with the Commanding Officer of NAF El Centro, Bill Perkins, and what a great guy. Later, as things continue to improve [with pandemic], you'll have a chance to meet this man.

Capt. Perkins:

Yes, I'm looking forward to interacting with the community. Until then, I asked everyone to be safe, continue to do the things the medical communities advise and protect yourself, protect your family, protect your workforce, and then we'll get through this together and be better in the end.

Gene Brister:

Well everyone, don't forget the Festival of Flight here on KXO, March 13 from 1230-430. Watch the show from your backyard and listen to us on KXO. We'll bring you a good show. This is Gene Brister broadcasting from the Naval Air Facility, El Centro, it's been my extreme pleasure.

Capt. Perkins:

Thank you, Gene.

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